



RUCKA › FERNÁNDEZ › MIWA › WYNNE

# THE OLD GUARD<sup>TM</sup> FORCE MULTIPLIED

ISSUE 1  
MATURE READERS

*This is a fairy tale of blood and bullets.*  
*It is the story of two women and three men who cannot die. Mostly.*  
*Their names are Andy, Nicky, Joe, Booker, and Nile.*  
*Nile joined them. Booker left them.*  
*This is what happens next...*

# THE OLD GUARD™

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# FORCE MULTIPLIED

“EVIL BEGINS WHEN YOU BEGIN TO TREAT PEOPLE AS THINGS.”

~Sir Terry Pratchett, *I Shall Wear Midnight*

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SOMEWHERE IN CENTRAL EURASIA.

6700 YEARS AGO.

(GIVE OR TAKE.)

What is it they say  
about your *first time*?

You can *never* forget it?

They're right.

You can't...



...no matter  
how hard you  
might try.



The thing about **battle...**



...it makes  
things **easy**.



You don't worry about  
right or wrong.



You just don't get the **luxury**.



You just don't have the **time**.



You're just trying to survive.

That's it, that's all...



...just red-vision rage...



...and pants-shitting fear.



Because you don't want to die.



THW!



That's the *first* time.



And when it's over, you're left with **everything** you felt.



Everything you did.



And you feel ashamed.

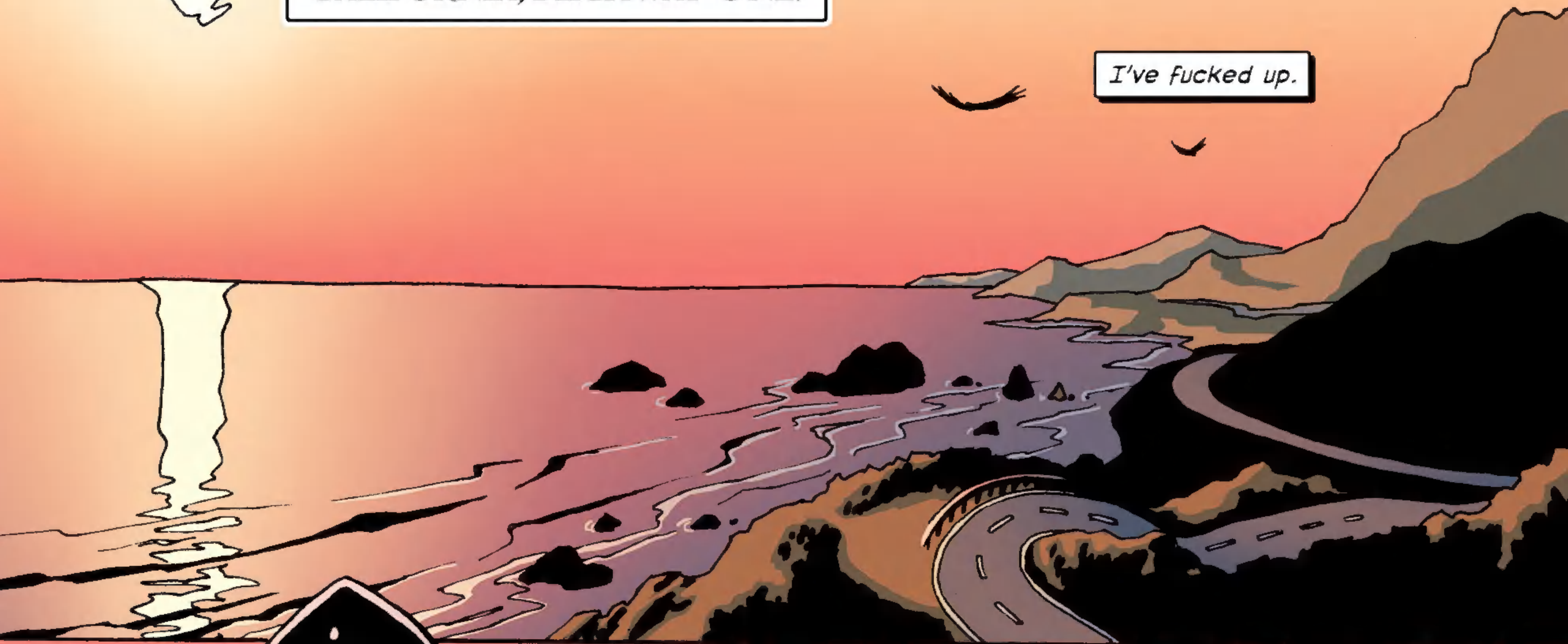


And that makes you **angry**.



CALIFORNIA, HIGHWAY ONE.

*I've fucked up.*



*A lot.*

*Admittedly, at six and a half thousand years old, you'd **expect** that.*



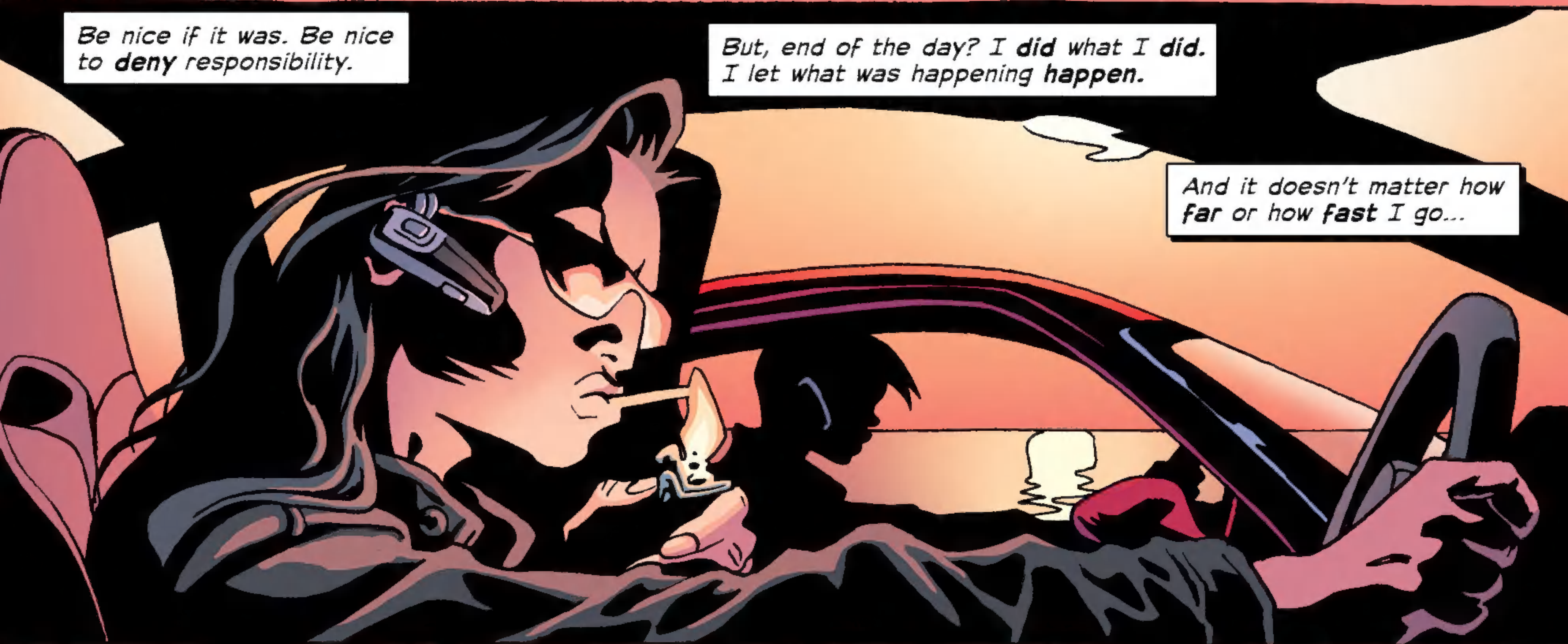
*But that ain't an **excuse**.*

*Just like saying that it was the **time** or the **culture** or the **people** isn't an excuse.*

*Be nice if it was. Be nice to **deny** responsibility.*

*But, end of the day? I **did** what I **did**. I let what was happening happen.*

*And it doesn't matter how far or how **fast** I go...*

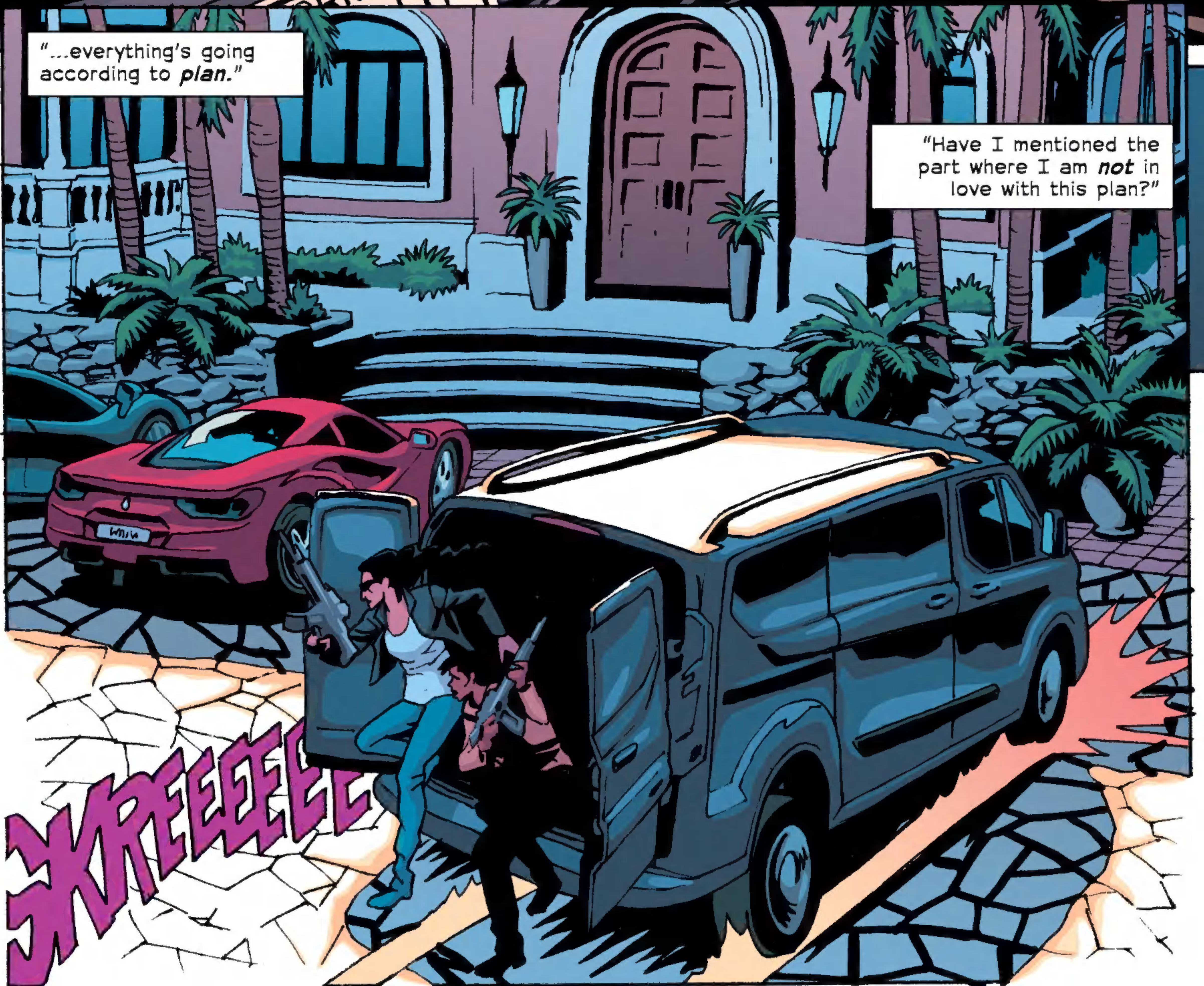


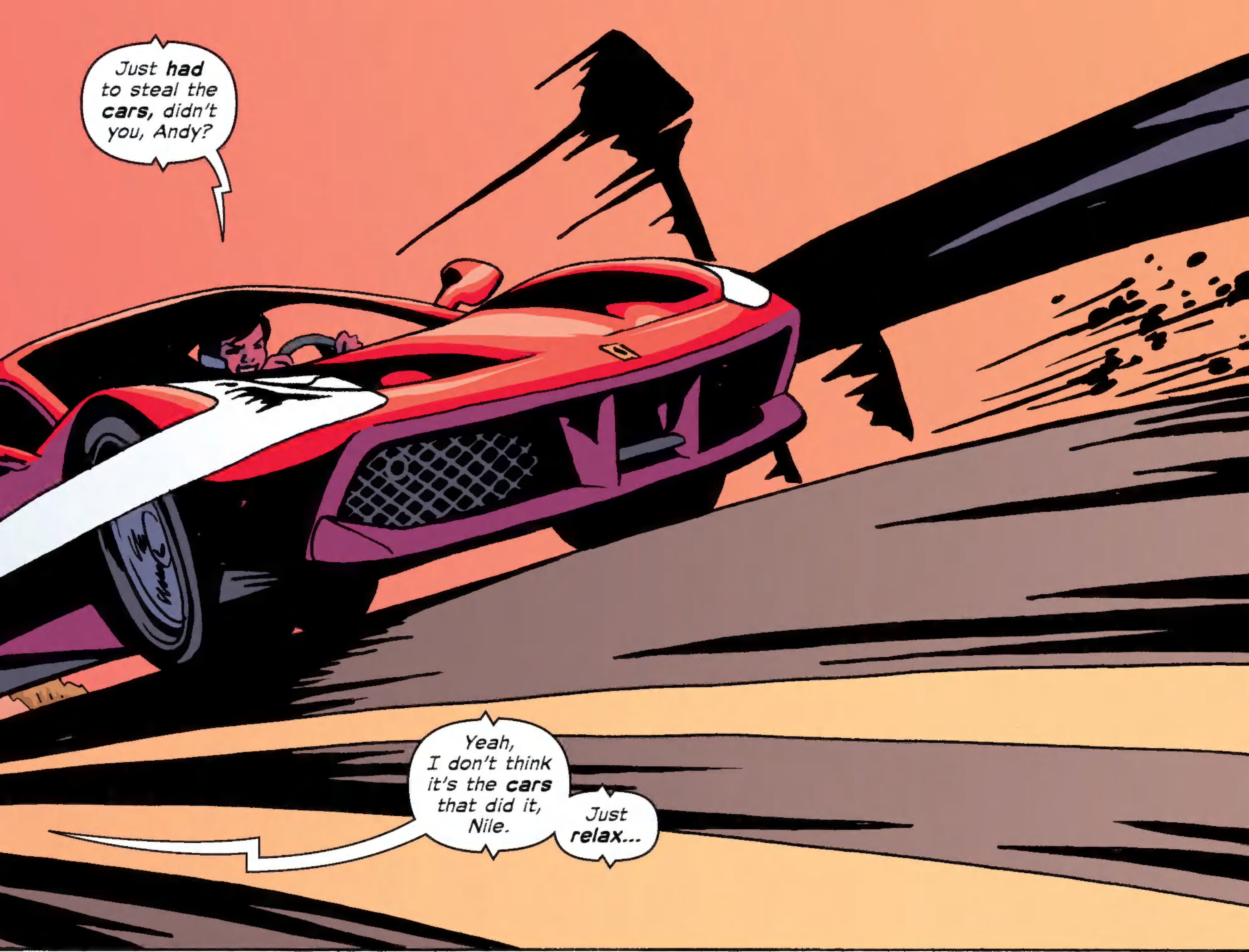
...it *all* catches up  
with you in the *end*.



"...everything's going  
according to *plan*."

"Have I mentioned the  
part where I am *not*  
in love with this plan?"





We get choices.



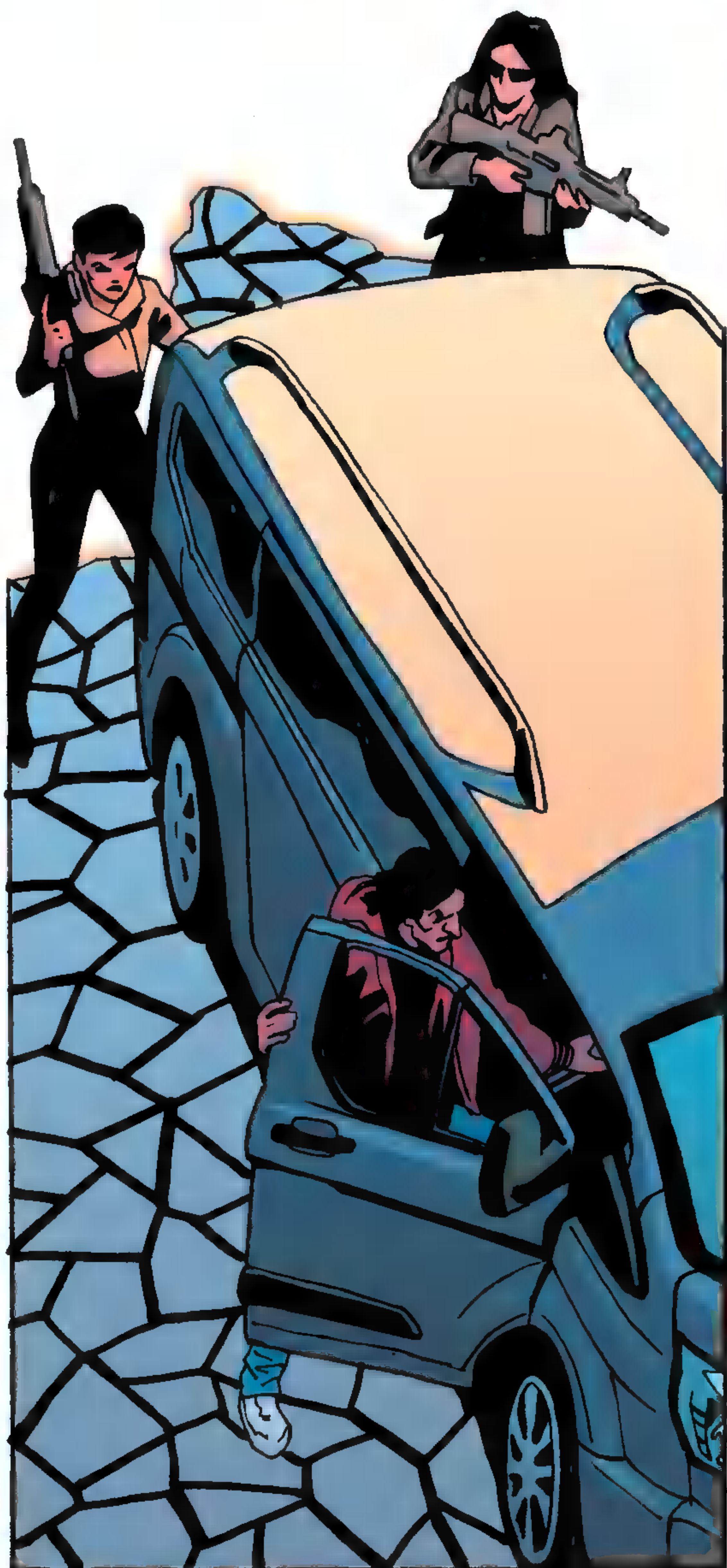
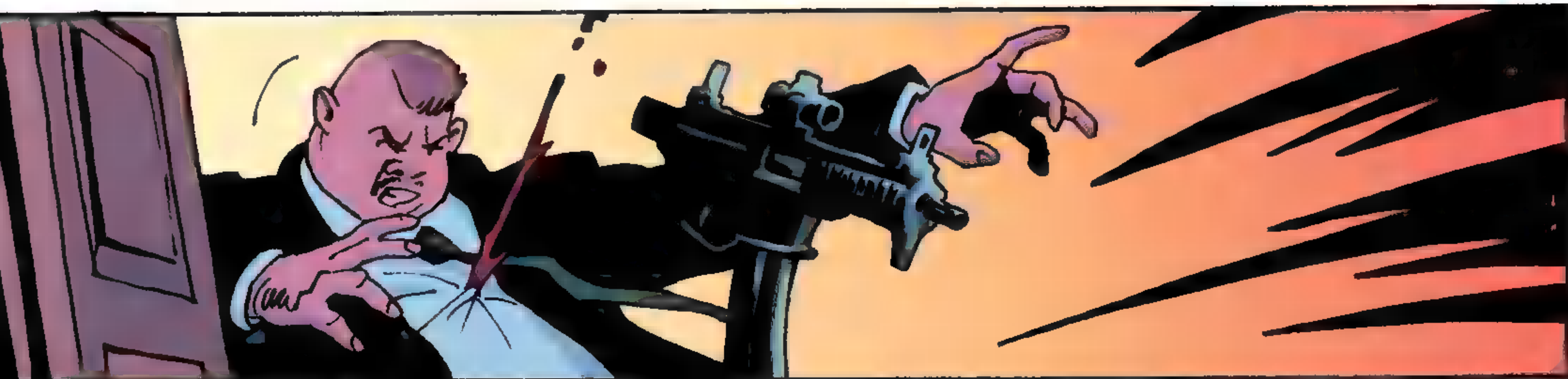
We can try to *atone*, try to make right...



...or we can *ignore* who's looking back at us in the mirror.



Some people are good at that.



Here's the thing about power:



People who have it believe they deserve it.

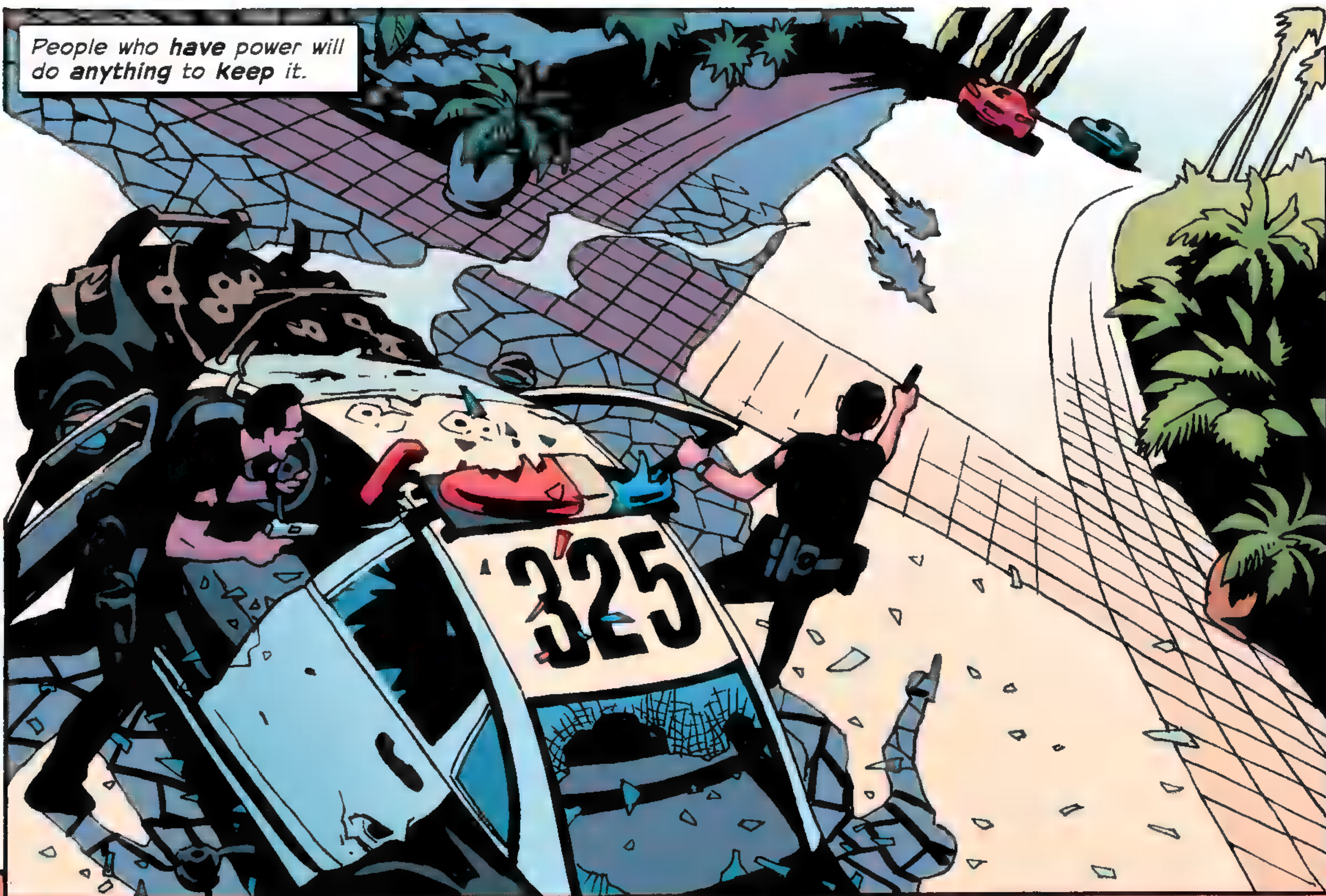


And so they believe those who don't deserve whatever happens to them.





People who **have** power will  
do **anything** to keep it.



And they'll do whatever they  
can to **convince** you that  
you're better off that way.

How many  
you think are  
following us?

It's **not** the  
ones **behind** us  
I'm worried  
about...



...it's  
what's in *front*  
of us.

Was  
wondering  
what happened  
to all the  
traffic.



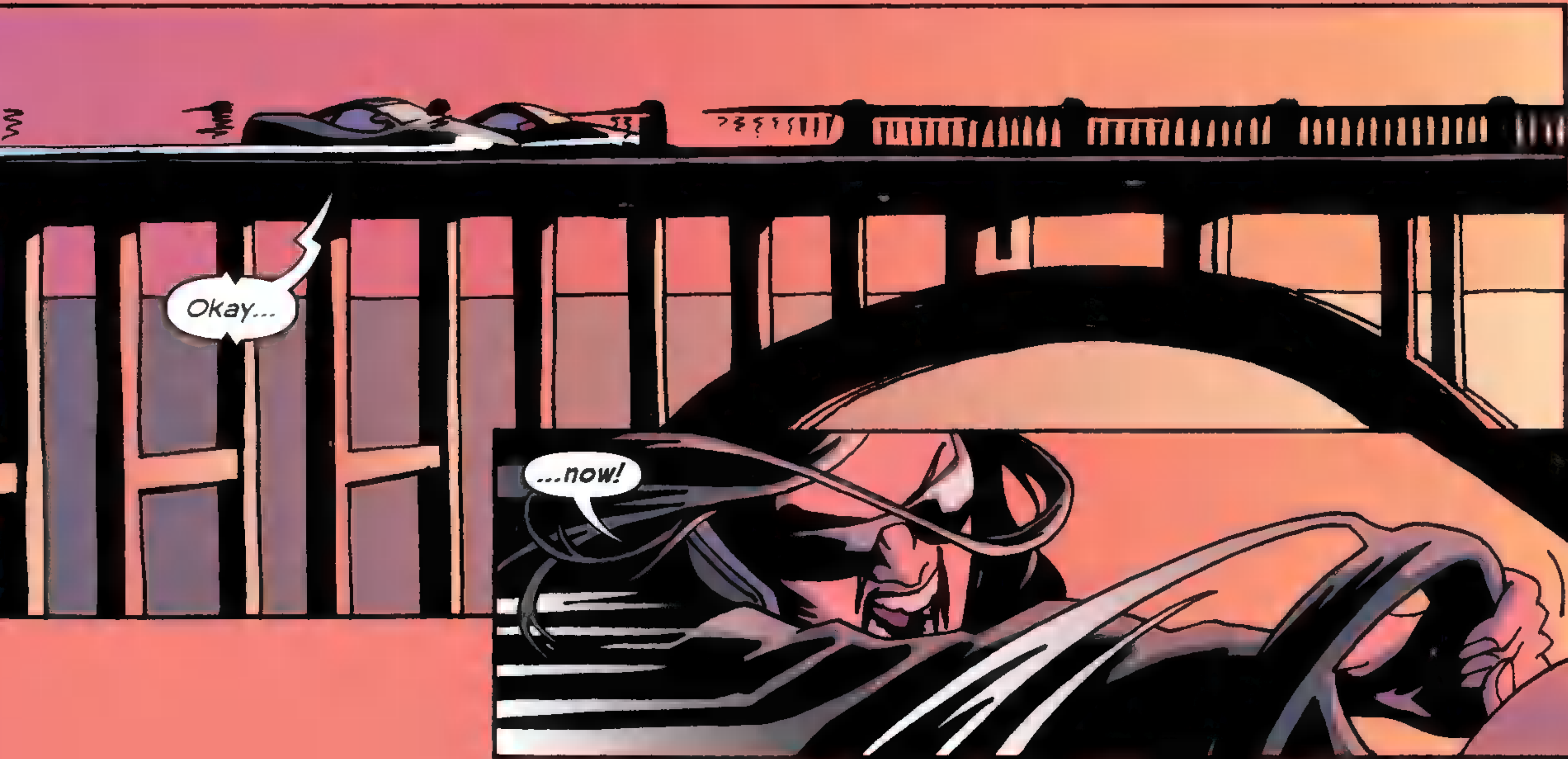
We'll do it  
once we *cross*  
the Bridge.

This  
is gonna  
*suck*.



What was  
that?

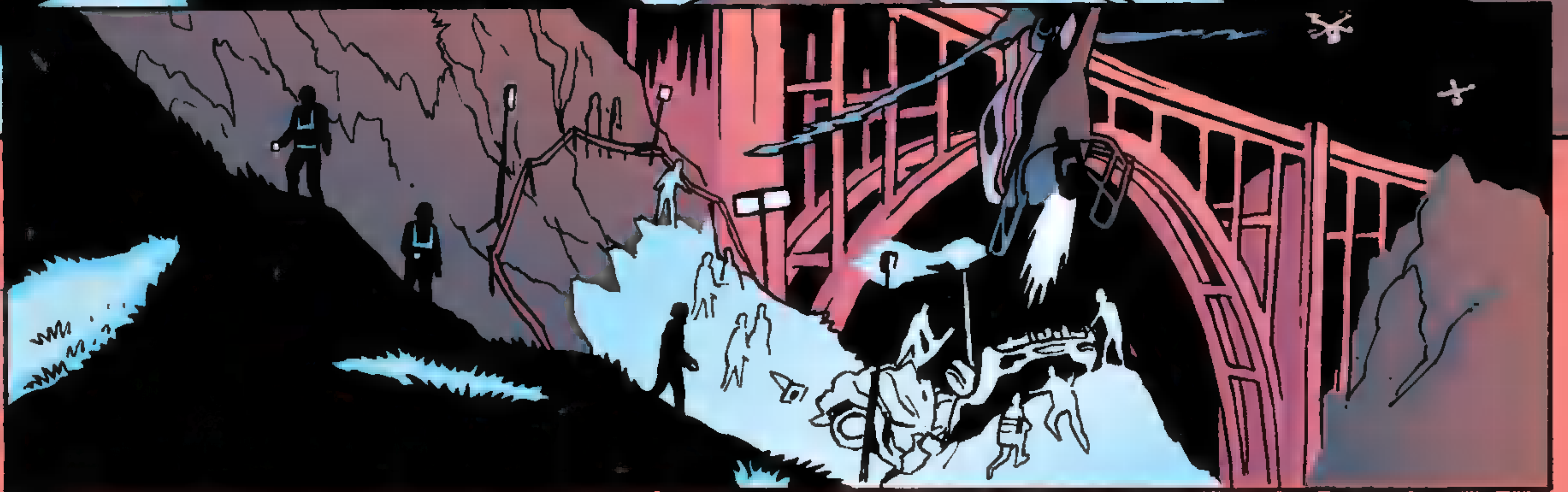
Nothing.



Okay...

...now!



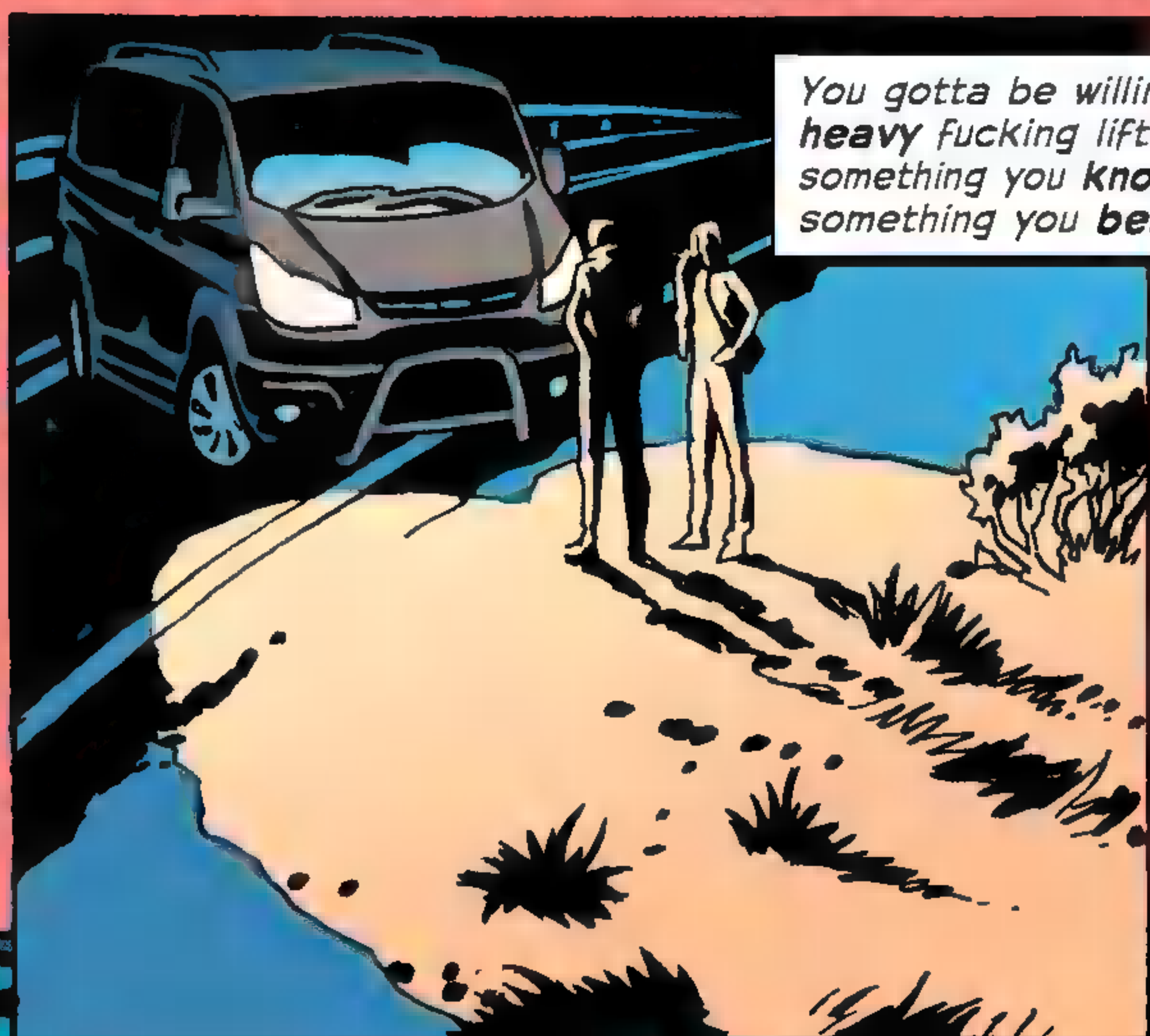




It's **always** easier to just **ignore** your **sins** than to **confront** them.



After all, it takes a **special** kind of asshole to be **proud** of doing the **wrong** thing.



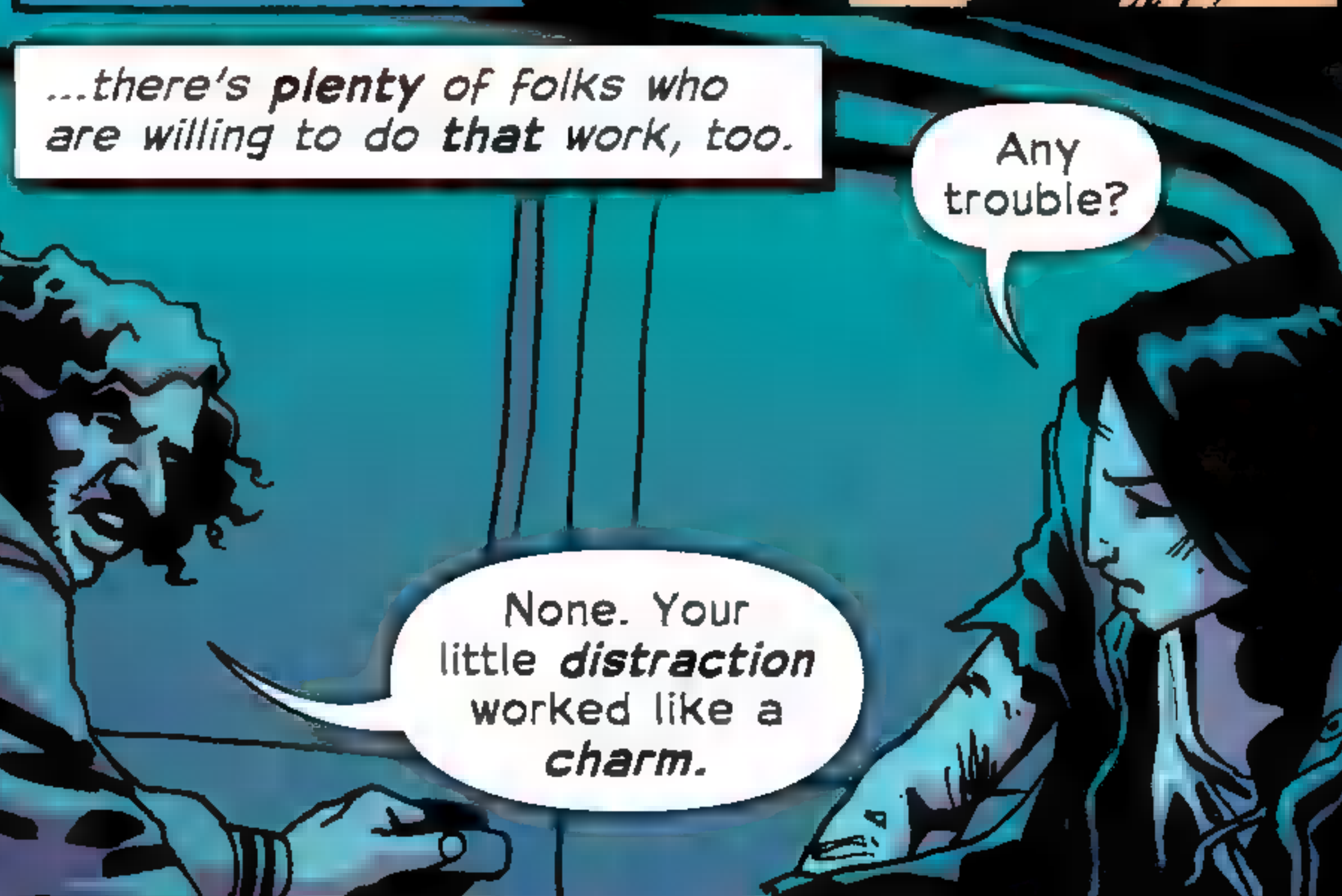
You gotta be willing to do some **heavy** fucking lifting to turn something you **know** is wrong into something you **believe** is right.



Thing is...

You guys look like Hell.

Nice to see you, too, Joe.



...there's **plenty** of folks who are willing to do **that** work, too.

Any trouble?

None. Your little **distraction** worked like a **charm**.



WHUMP  
WHUMP

Where to **next**?

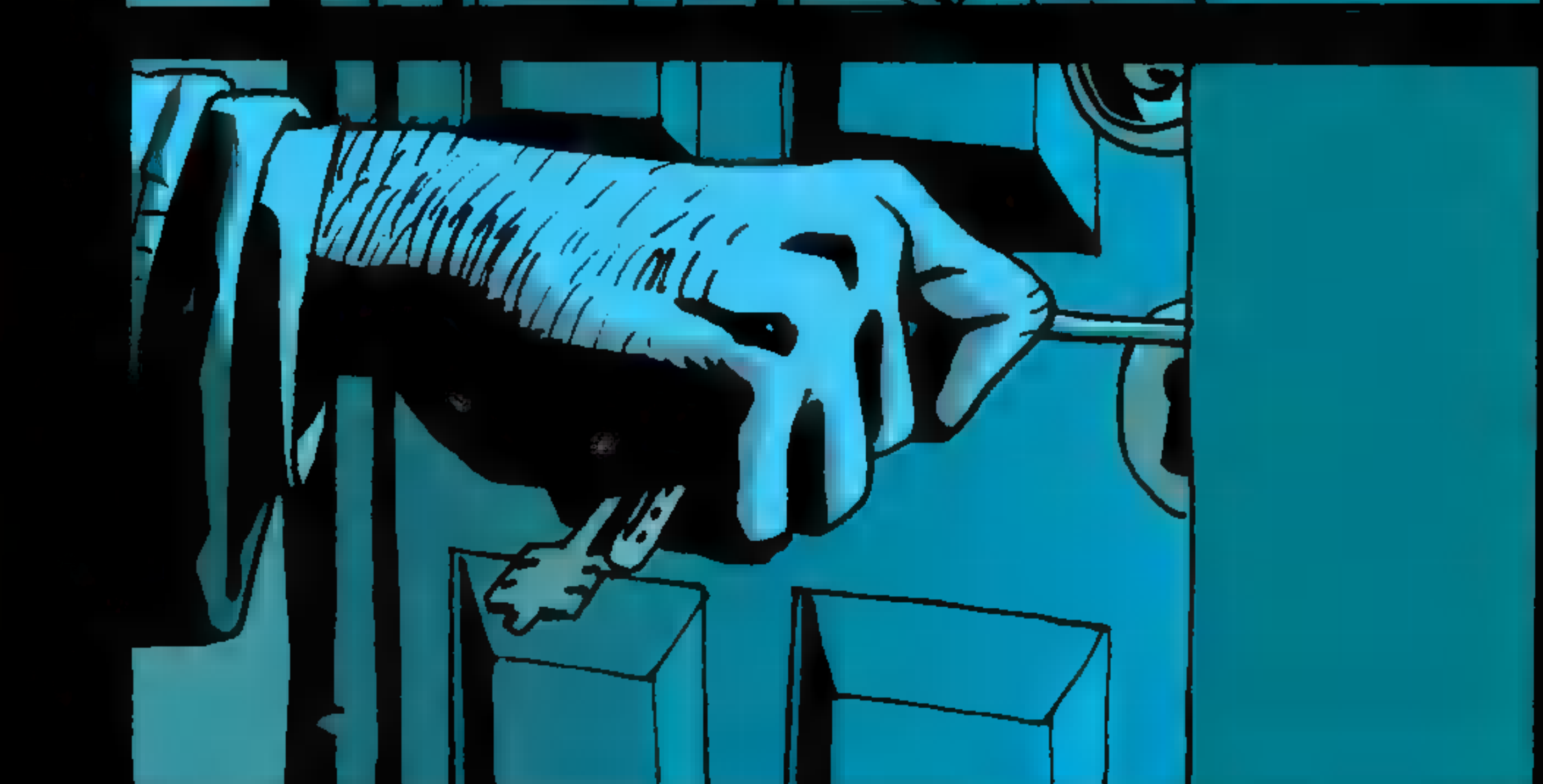


Keep **following** the **chain**...

MARSEILLE.

"...eventually we'll reach the *top*...."











Where.  
Are.  
The.

Others?

What  
others?

I *don't*  
know what  
you're talking  
ab--

Load  
him up.



I was hoping we could *avoid* this...



...but you are leaving me *little* by way of *choice*.

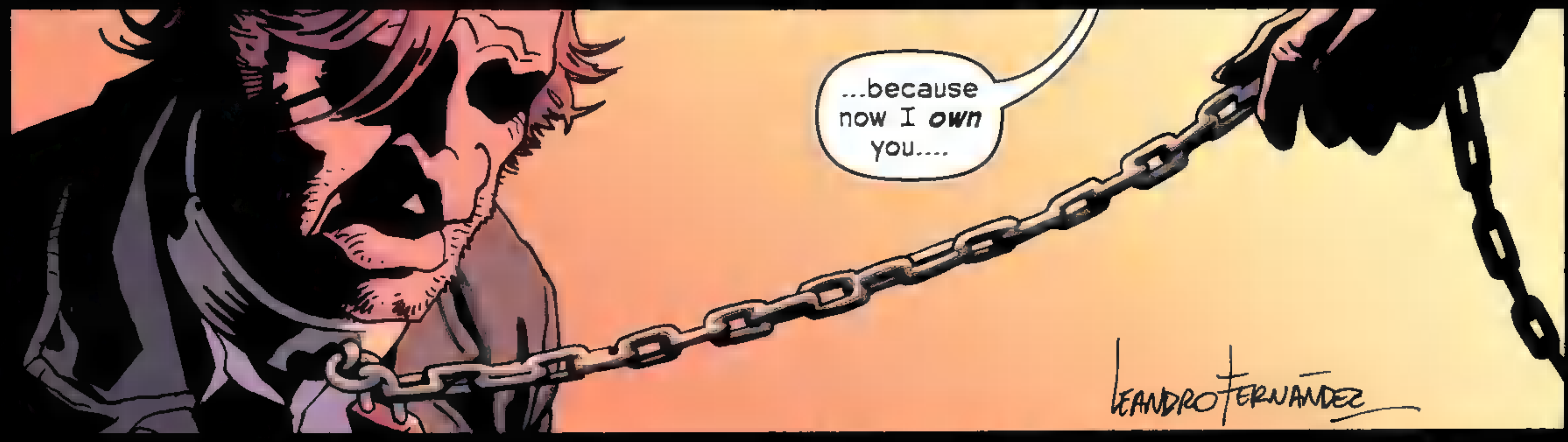
I *don't* know--



So you have said, but I believe you are *lying*.



You *will* tell me *everything* I want to *know*...



...because now I *own* you....

LEANDRO FERNANDEZ





# RETURNING FIRE

## I WANT TO TALK ABOUT HOW THIS WHOLE THING STARTED.

This seems a reasonable thing to do, because *The Old Guard* has already carried all of us involved much further than we'd ever imagined. Now that you hold the start to the second of what we ultimately intend to be three chapters in this tale of our reluctant immortals in your hand, well, no time like the present, right?



### I AM A WEIRD WRITER, LET'S PUT THAT OUT UP FRONT.

Most writers are, and if you break it down, you can see where we're coming from: we sit, for the most part, alone in our rooms and tell stories to ourselves, and then have the temerity to believe other people need to benefit (or at least be subjected to) the results of this exercise. Stories, like all creative endeavors, are acts of will. This thing doesn't exist, and then you beat at it until it does, until an idea takes form and refines and executes. Sometimes the seed of the idea comes in inspiration, or in context, or in conversation, or in a stray thought. Sometimes you look back and cannot remember, for the life of you, where the idea was born.

*The Old Guard* was born from Andy, and Andy was born, in turn, out of two ideas that ended up braiding together. The first was, simply, this: I'd had, for years, this woman living in my head without paying rent, this proto-Amazonian warrior who had walked for millennia without dying for some reason. I knew things about her—or she told me things about her, if you're of the kind who prefers a more romantic interpretation. I knew she was *old* but didn't look it, that she could not die, and that she was *tired*. I knew that, if experience was the best teacher, she'd been its best student, if not by intent then by sheer dint of staying power. I knew that there wasn't a weapon or combat technique that she hadn't mastered, because the one thing she had plenty of was time.

There were other things I knew about her. I knew that the last century, in particular, had been difficult for her. Things were changing very quickly around her, and she was having trouble keeping up. That she felt lost, and alone, and that the one thing that had remained consistent throughout all of her millennia was that people pretty much sucked. She was a warrior, she fought, that's what she *was*, and as a result she'd seen pretty much all the worst the world could offer, and not a lot of its best. And that, when she'd seen its best...well, she hadn't been able to share in it, because always, always, always the people around her would die, and she would not.

I have a friend who has argued with me that being immortal would be *great*, and maybe he's right, I don't know. I suppose it's a question of temperament and personality more than anything else, but I know that as much as it'd be great to have *all* the time to do *all* the things I wanted, to read *all* the books and see *all* the sights and meet *all* the people, the inevitable, repeated loss of connection with those around me...it would wear me down. It would, ultimately, break my heart. There's a difference between being alone and being lonely. Given enough time, immortality would—to me—move from being a blessing to become a curse.

Time claims all, they say, and it is absolutely true. Six thousand years is nothing on the cosmic scale, but it is an incomprehensibly long time on a human one. Most of us can't remember what

we were doing last Wednesday. Even the *world* forgets. This woman, living rent-free in my brain, is *older than the pyramids*. Time has wiped away every reference, every place, every thing, every one she has ever known *over and over again*. There is *no reliable historical record* from the period she was born. It doesn't *exist*. All we have are theories, but even the archaeology is scant and suspect. That is how old she is.

(This, incidentally, has made things challenging when trying to depict Andy's past, as we have in this issue. Literally, Leo and I have had to figure out if *belts had buckles* only to discover that...maybe? Want to know how a writer fucks himself? He does it like this: Andy is six thousand seven hundred years old, give or take. This means she was born at the end of the Neolithic/start of the Chalcolithic periods, or at the transition between the Stone and Copper Ages. It wasn't until I was *literally* standing in the British Museum in 2018 that I realized the reason I was having such a hard damn time finding historical reference for the period when she was born is because *it doesn't exist*. Why doesn't it exist? Because the Copper Age was followed by the *Bronze Age*, and what do you make bronze out of?

Right.

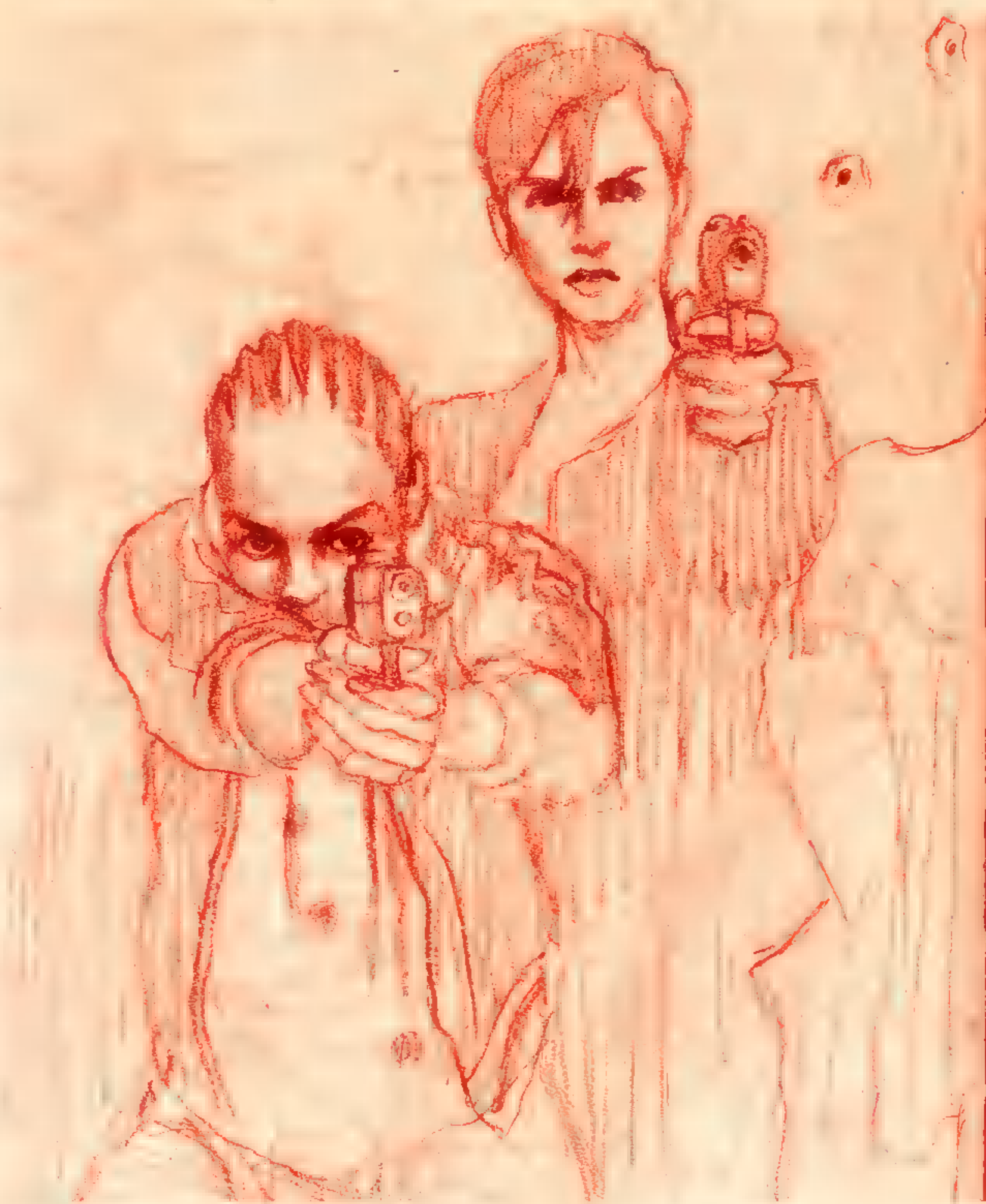
Literally, they melted down most of the Copper Age to make the Bronze Age. Thanks, history.)

So here's this woman who is so old that even *she* isn't sure what her name is, because she's had so many of them down the years, and it's not like she could spell it when it was given to her. This is a woman who has seen and done it *all*. Why not? What's the worst that can happen? It's not like it'll kill her.

That was the first part.

The second part is harder to track to its origin, but I blame my wife.

We refer to it in shorthand as "the ghost platoon," and it was Jennifer who truly introduced me to the idea. I say "introduced" and not "created," because it's part urban myth, part military lore, and it's existed for hundreds of years that we know of, and I'd be shocked if it actually hasn't existed for thousands. The idea is, simply, that there is, somewhere *out there*, this group of soldiers who have made the ultimate sacrifice throughout time, who have given their lives, but who live on to appear



SKETCH BY LEANDRO FERNÁNDEZ

in those moments of (military) need. It's an idea I played with for a short story, years and years ago, it's an idea that threads throughout pop-culture. Stan Ridgway wrote a damn song about it, *Camouflage*, seriously. It's a good song, and one of the ones I listened to a lot while writing the first series.

So here's Andy, and here's this companion idea, that she's not absolutely alone, that there are a handful of others like her.

One of the first problems you run into with this set-up is that, if your heroes cannot die, there's not a lot of jeopardy at work. This is why—simply for dramatic purposes—it became important that they *could* die, but they didn't know the how or the when or the why of it. There was no silver bullet or stake through the heart. And the more I looked at that, the more in love I fell with this idea that the threat to their immortality was as existential as the conflict their immortality provided them—that the thing that didn't kill you yesterday could well be the thing that kills you tomorrow, and that they never *know*. So every time they go into battle, they are—on some level—gambling with their lives, just as every soldier throughout history has had to do.

Now, you read all of this, and I'll admit, it reads heavy. This story of the saddest, oldest woman ever, walking through an endless world, outliving

everyone around her, even the people who are like her. This woman who has six thousand years at her back and just wants it to *end* and it just *won't*. This story about this woman who needs to learn to live her life again, because she's been coasting on autopilot for centuries now, who has lost her faith in humanity, in the world. And who, over and over again, has had her heart broken, despite everything she does to protect herself, to insulate herself.

But surprisingly, what I wrote wasn't heavy, at least not on the surface.

When I sat down to start writing—and I remember this, which is rare for me—I actively decided *to have fun with it*. I knew Leandro Fernández was going to be drawing the series, we'd been discussing it for a while, and I knew what he'd bring stylistically as well as artistically, and I wanted to turn into his style. In the broadest strokes, I had a team of Wile E. Coyotes and I could drop them off every cliff I wanted and have them squeaking around making accordion noises afterwards and they'd always bounce back. We were making a Looney Tunes story for grown-ups, for lack of a better word. Those of you who remember *Animaniacs*? Read Andy's dialogue as spoken by Slappy Squirrel, you'll see what I mean. Andy is the crankiest grandmother in the history of grandparents. The whole damn world needs to get off her lawn. And I *love that about her*.

Of course, Leo proceeded to draw the hell out of what I was giving him. The violence was over the top, the funny bits were really funny, and the silliness of it all ended up balancing nicely with the gravity of it all, because *of course* the first story had to be an introduction. We had to learn their world, their gift (or curse, in Andy's opinion), and the best way to do that was to tell the story of the newest member, Nile Freeman, and what happened when someone (Merrick) discovered what it was they could do. Or precisely, could *not* do.

This was all well and good until I hit about issue four of the first series and realized what I was really writing about. I said writers are weird. I won't lay this on anyone else, but speaking personally—more often than not—I will think I am writing about one thing only to discover, either after the fact or in revision or, sometimes, when a reader literally *points it out to me*, that I've actually written something else entirely.

Around issue four, I realized *The Old Guard* was about the death of my father. More precisely, it was me trying to articulate the argument, or to somehow reconcile, *the necessity of death*. It is an attempt to understand, on some level, the fact that all things must pass, and it is, in some way, about the pain and grief carried by those left behind.

Not so Wile E. Coyote after all, I guess.



#### AND YET.

Leandro drew this sexy, violent, absolutely absurd, oftentimes hilarious book. He made Joe's *eye* dangling off his face, he made Andy missing a piece of skull, he made Booker missing his head *and* his junk funny—silly and funny when it could have been, maybe should've been, nothing but gross. I still don't know how he did that.

Then he would turn on a dime and break your damn heart with the story of Booker's pain and death and subsequent heartbreak. He would make you swoon for Joe's declaration of love for Nicky. Then he'd make you laugh again with Nile and Andy and Booker as street pizza in Dubai.

Then Daniela would come to those same pages and work her unique magic, would illuminate—often literally—the brilliance that Leo had laid down with her own. Together, they created a *look* that was so effortlessly evocative and elegant you could almost miss the subtleties at work, the play of light across the plaza in Barcelona, the heat wash of South Sudan.

Then came Jodi to make the words work, selling every gag and wrenching every last tear free from my broken, sordid prose. Then came Eric, to frame the book itself.

And then there was Alejandro, who came aboard at the start to edit this thing, having no idea what

he was getting into, and thank God he did, because we'd never have crossed the finish line without him, we wouldn't be here *now* without him.

A good comic is always, always, *always* an exercise in collaboration, it is always something

that is greater than the sum of its component parts. That's one of the things I love about the medium. Together, we make something great, something that (at least speaking for myself) could not exist alone.



SO WE MADE THIS THING AND RELEASED IT INTO the world, and we were proud of it and thought it was silly and well made and ultimately a fun story, well told, and—honest to God—we had no expectations. I mean, *none*. We figured some people would pick it up, and hopefully they'd enjoy it, and that would be a success.

The first issue sold out and we went to a second printing. Then went to a third printing. Then we went to a second printing on issue two, and by the time we got to issue three we had the order numbers right, and I think that was it for going back to press, but the thing was, guys, the thing *was*...

...people seemed to really *like it*.

Somewhere after the end of the first series, when we'd put it to bed, Leo told me that he wanted to do another one. He actually had been hinting at it as we were closing in on the end of the initial series, but he came out and said it, *let's do another*, he said.

This was not in my plans, if I'm honest. I have a bad habit of not being able to let a story go, because I do what he did, except I do it *all the time*. I get halfway through the story I'm writing and I'm already seeing ideas for the *next* one, and the problem I have is that I tend to get caught up in these elaborate, multi-part things that, while I love telling them, they almost always end up longer than I'd initially envisioned. Honest to God, I was trying to keep the thing *tight* this time, was going to let the story just stand as it was.

But there was Leo, saying, c'mon, there has to be more, right? You've got more, right?

And I did, I mean, there were questions we hadn't answered, and things we hadn't been able to do, and yes, I had an idea for a second (and frankly a third), but I'd been trying *so hard* to keep things under control, so to speak.

Then *you* came along and asked when the next issue was coming out. And you didn't listen when

I said, look, no, we are not going to jump 100 years into the future, this was always planned as a mini-series, honest to God. Yes, fine, I understand, you said. When's the next one coming out? What happens next? Copley is still out there, Greg, and he *knows*, I mean, c'mon. Never mind that I want to find out what happened to Booker and my friend here wants to know what happens with Nile and we're both wondering if we're ever going to find out more about Andy and where she came from, and, while we're at it, if there's a reveal of the deeper mythology at work here, because you've got that figured out, right?

I did not need my arm twisted, let's put it like that. But I knew, going into this story, into *Force Multiplied*, a couple of things. I knew—and Leo, Alejandro, and I discussed—that if we did a second story, we would do a third, and that would be *it*. There was an arc to the whole thing, we would follow that arc and see where it took us. I knew that, tonally, we'd be dealing with some different things thematically, potentially darker things. I knew that following the successful surprise that was the first series, a second series would be more of an uphill climb.

Then something else happened.

There's this little company, they make movies, inconsequential little films that nobody sees with names like *True Grit* and *Mission: Impossible* and *Star Trek*. Skydance asked if they could make a movie of *The Old Guard*. I asked if I could write it. They said I could. I did. They found a lady by the name of Gina Prince-Bythewood to direct it. They found a producer by the name of Marc Evans to shepherd the process along. They found a studio, another fly-by-night nobody operation that no one has ever heard of, called Netflix, and Netflix said, you know what? We'd like to make that movie.

So they did. They went off to England and then

they went to Morocco, and they made a movie.

I tried to write this next bit, for the record, three times, maintaining the same pseudo-sarcastic tone as above, and...yeah, I can't do it. I just can't downplay it.

Guys. *Guys*.

*Charlize Theron* is Andy. *KiKi Layne* is Nile. *Matthias Schoenaerts* is Booker. *Marwan Kenzari* is Joe. *Luca Marinelli* is Nicky. *Harry Melling* is Merrick. *Chiwetel Ejiofor* is Copley.

This is for real, and I know it's for real, because I spent a month on set in England and Leo was in both England *and* Morocco and we started with a comic book and sometime in 2020 there will be a movie and I'm going to say it again because even after *everything* I just said it's still crazy and it's still

surprising and it is no less wonderful and strange for all of it and I am going to stop typing now because this is a run-on sentence of epic proportions.

This is part one of *The Old Guard, Chapter Two: Force Multiplied*. All of us involved are grateful you've come along for the ride. All of us hope you will continue this strange, wonderful, absurd, funny, heartbreaking journey with us.

This is for you.

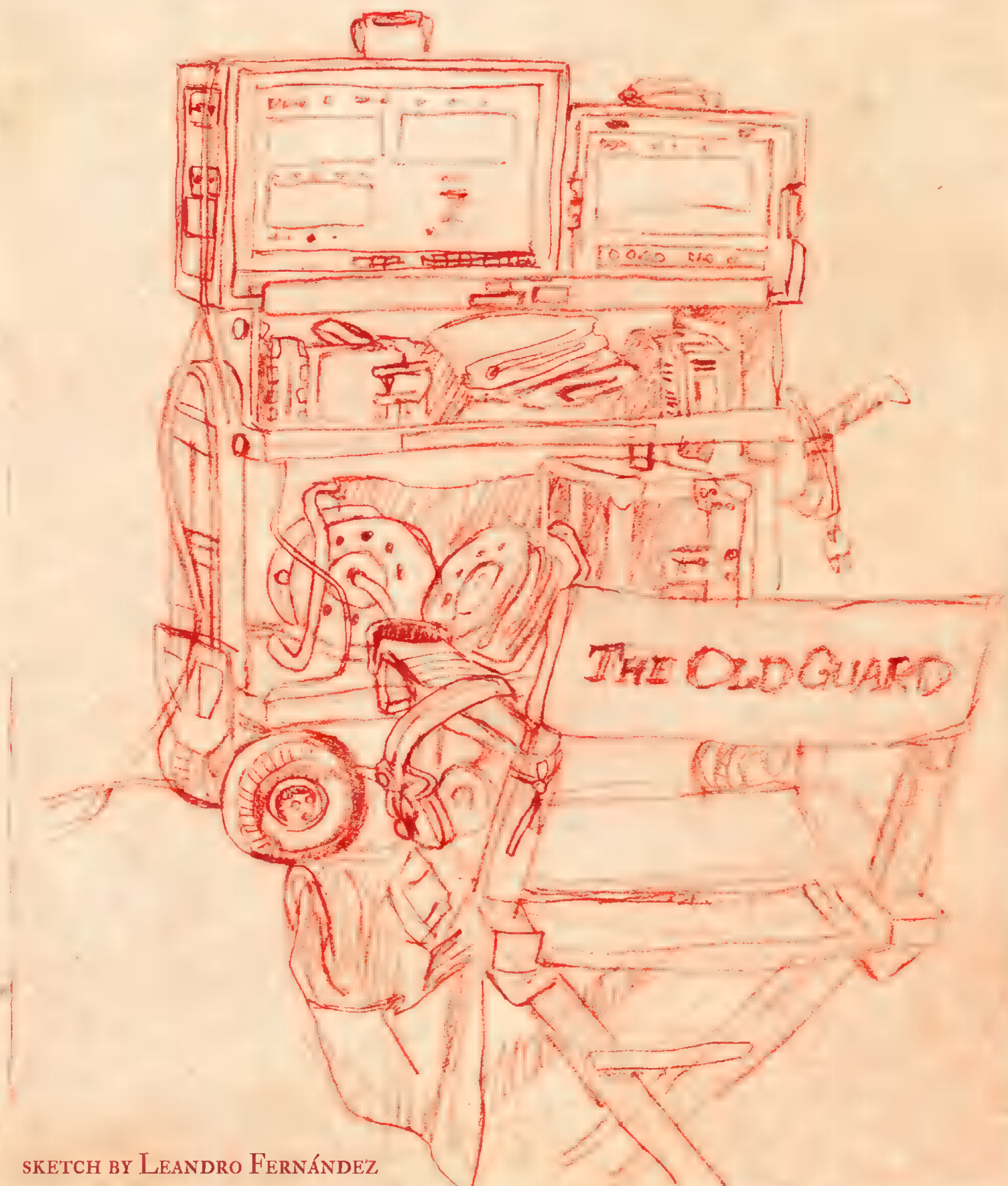
And this is for my father.

I miss you, Pop. I wish you could've lived to have seen this.

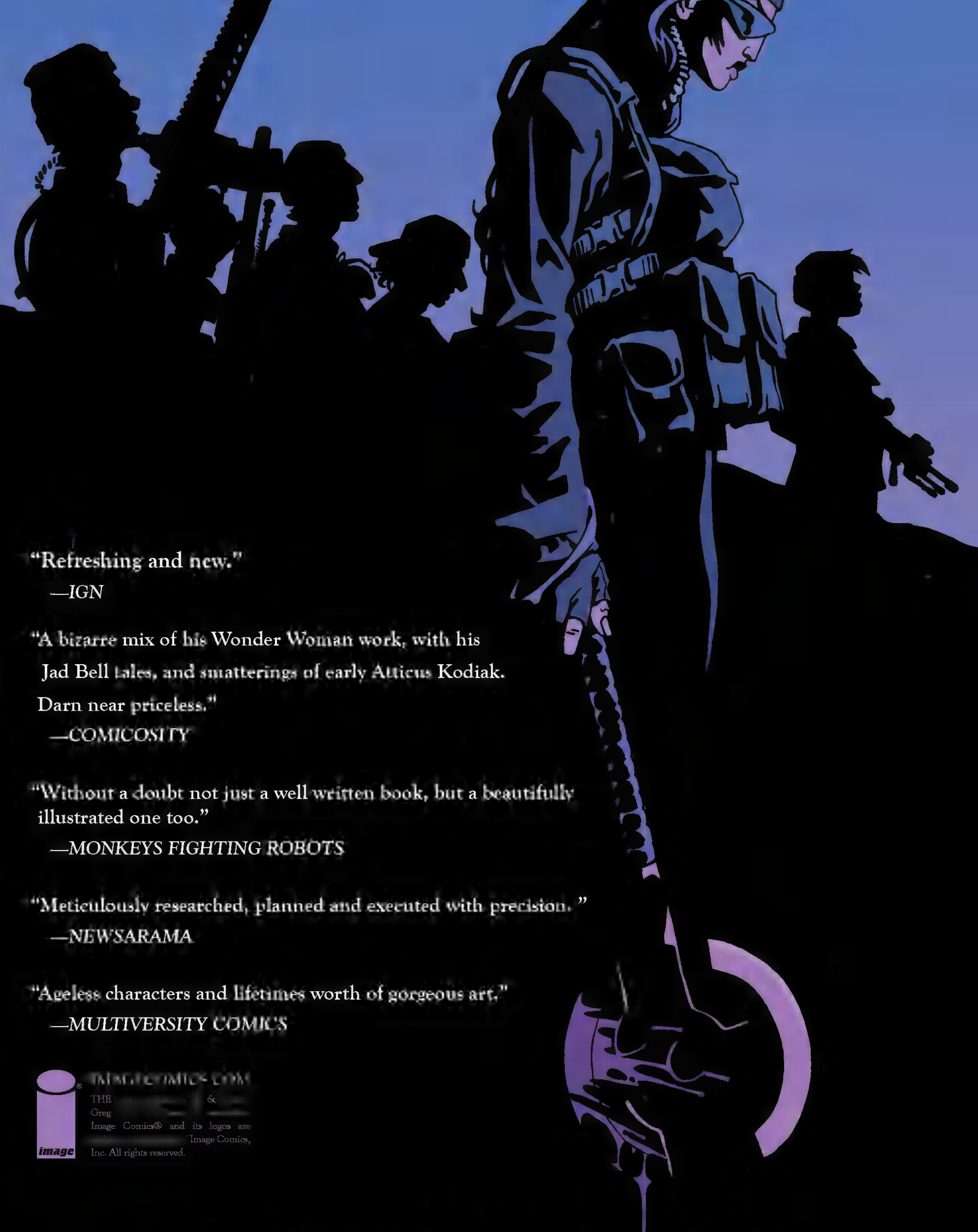
**GREG RUCKA**

Portland, Oregon

November, 2019



SKETCH BY LEANDRO FERNÁNDEZ



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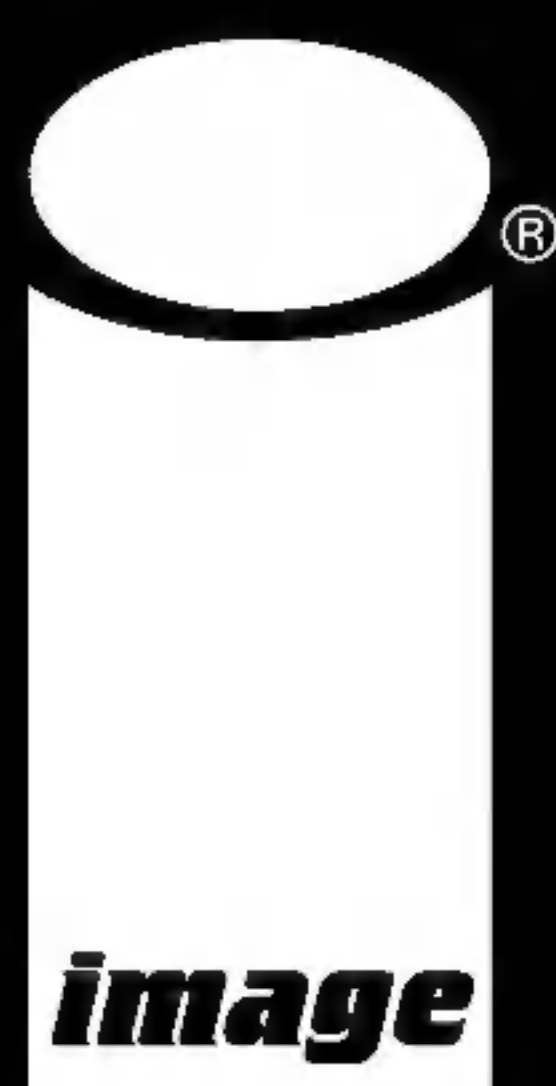
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## FORCE MULTIPLIED

### PART TWO

Andy wrestles with her past. Nile comes to grips with her future. Booker drowns. And the FBI gets involved.

JANUARY 22, 2020





“Everything’s going according to plan.”

RATED **M** / MATURE

